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Jivaro Souls

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THE Jivaro people (various tribes of eastern Ecuador have long been famous for their warlike practices,[1] but the assumptions about reality upon which they predicate such behavior have not been systematically studied and analyzed.[2] A very important series of these assumptions is to be found in the Jivaro ideas concerning souls. Among these concepts has recently been discovered a deep-seated belief that killing leads to the acquisition of souls which provide a supernatural power conferring immunity from death. The purpose of the present paper is to outline some of the basic elements of these beliefs with the hope of providing a greater insight into Jivaro behavior.[3]

The emphasis here will be on presenting new data collected in 1956-57,[4] but the concluding paragraphs of the paper embody a commentary on relevant statements in the major publications dealing with this subject. In the extent it should be mentioned that I took the two most useful works on the Jivaro (Karsten 1935, Stirling 1938) into the field and went over them in detail with native informants. Accordingly, points of difference between the following material and that given by Karsten and Stirling should definitely be taken by the reader to indicate modification or elaboration of the previously published statements, at least in regard to the Jivaro proper.[5]

Field research providing the present data was conducted for ten and a half months in the following river valleys occupied by the Jivaro: the Rio Upano and its tributaries, the Rio Tutanangoza and the Rio Jaya, the Rio Chiguaza, the Rio Macuma, the Rio Canguimi, the Rio Cusuimi, the Rio Mangosiza, and in a refugee Jivaro settlement near Bucay on the western slope of the Andes. Informants who contributed particularly to the information embodied in the present paper were: *Wakrampit*, *Tsukinapit*, *Tsiki Akaia*, *Kapalit*, and *Tsiu Akaia* of the Rio Tutanangoza; *Wata* of the upper Rio Macuma; and *Shiniat* of the Rio Canguimi. Chief interpreters were *Shuap A*, *Tsapi*, and *Nain*, all from the Rio Tutanangoza region.

The best information on supernatural concepts was obtained in intensive eight or nine hour daily interviews with single informants over periods of a few days to several weeks. This was an exhausting procedure for all involved: interviewer, interpreter, and informant, but was conducive to the elicitation of truthful detail. Informants' accounts were continually cross-checked and contradictions called to their attention individually. An informant, when thus confronted with a contradiction, and with his reputation for knowledge and veracity at stake, generally provided elaborative supporting detail which he might not have otherwise volunteered.

[Reference to publication of footnotes, see Complete 114, 17:282-283 -- Comm 1962]

from natural forms of life or other natural phenomena. Stirling (1938:119) also errs in stating that "All of the principal nature gods . . . remain powerful creatures." In fact, it is highly questionable whether there are any supernatural figures whom the Rivers could be said to view as gods. Stirling's candidates for gods are primarily "Pirbri, the Rain God," and "Pungi, the great anaconda River God." Any such deities are not part of the supernaturalism of the Rivers proper. Lawson (1956:39) has already taken note of this situation, saying, "But the Rivers have no belief in a personal Rainmaker Pirbri." Actually, *pungari* is the correct term and refers to a plant which the Rivers are magically to cause rain to swell the rivers so that their enemies cannot cross successfully. But it is not a god. The actual supernatural role of "Pungi" (*pugi*) is not significantly greater than has been indicated in the preceding descriptions of the ancient and malash souls. Lawson (1956:39) is the correct in rejecting claim for a Rivers deity named "Yambumma" (see Howard and Morauta 1969:126), a claim simply deriving from a casual statement by an early traveler to the Rivers country. While on the subject of supposed Rivers gods, it might as well be mentioned that Lawson's (1955:139) [illegible] candidate for an "Earth-mother" goddess really refers to a class of female spirits (*wagai*) which can probably be best defined as crop fairies. She (or really, they) also has no husband, despite such a claim by Lawson (1955:179).

In regards to the malash, Lawson (1955:139) was aware of the generally harmful nature of the spirit of a slain enemy, but does not report some of the major beliefs surrounding it, nor is he apparently cognizant of the term for the avenging spirit while in motion in the hunter. He (1956:29) is wrong when he states that the sixth storyteller head is not called "hamua," but can I agree with him when he says (1956:30), " . . . I have indicated the real purpose of the hunter, and in my statements, founded on personal observation and many careful inquiries, there is nothing to add and nothing to correct."

Stirling does not mention an avenging soul or spirit. While he notes (1938:74) that the hunter possesses magical power, he incorrectly identifies such power as "namiama," when it is really power emanating from the weapon.

Lawson fails to distinguish the edible wakarl and then, since he uses the term wakarl alone, it is difficult to tell when his remarks apply to this portion or not. He is definitely wrong in his statement (1955:172) that: " . . . animals, plants and inanimate objects . . . seem to be conceived simply as diminished human souls." What is fact is that no plants or inanimate objects are believed to be souls (although a few specific plants have souls) and only a few animals (e.g., dove, owls) are believed to be such. All other creatures with blood are thought to have some kind of true soul. Stirling never mentions wakarl.

To the reader who wonders whether some of these conflicts are due to culture change during the intervals between fieldwork by the different investigators, I submit the fact that several of my most important informants were already visiting families prior to Lawson's initial Rivers fieldwork in

1914–1916 and did not come into significant firsthand contact with Whites until 15 to 20 years later. Stirling's fieldwork came after Karsten's, in 1930–31. The informants were also aware that what was wanted was the traditional Jivaro view, with recent innovations in belief being recorded separately.

Finally, there remains the question of whether the contradictions between the several investigators' reports stem in part from the fact that both Karsten and Stirling visited other Jivaroan tribes (i.e., Achuara, Huambisa, and Aguaruna) in addition to the Jivaro proper. In order to assess this possibility, I queried linguists who had been making prolonged investigations among the Huambisa and Aguaruna, and also personally questioned several Aguaruna, Huambisa, and Achuara men.[4] As a result, it was determined that Stirling's term "huatsumu," for example, is completely unknown in all the Jivaroan tribes, "ururuk" being used by the Achuara and Huambisa and "shaam" by the Aguaruna. Likewise reported almost entirely beliefs in Stirling's role as emanata "gods" or in Karsten's earthmother "goddess." In fact, these cursory inquiries suggest that the total belief systems of the other Jivaroan tribes may prove to be basically similar to that sketched here for the Jivaro proper.

NOTES

[1] The nine Jivaroan groups dwell, roughly speaking, between the Río Pastaza in the north and the upper Río Santiago in the south, and from the 2,000-foot contour elevation of the eastern slope of the Andes to the east to the Río Pongal in the east. The subject here considered, the Jivaroan tribe which is usually referred to in the existing literature as the "Jivaro proper," "Jivaro," "Jíbaro," "Gnandawan Jivaro," or "Shuara." This last term, Shuara, does not mean "Jivaro," as often has been stated, but is used by the Jivaro proper to refer to any Indian or group of Indians without regard to cultural or linguistic affiliation. "Untsuri Shuara," meaning "numerous Indians," is the designation applied to this tribe by its close eastern Jivaroan neighbor, the Achuara (the Untsuri Shuara). Most of the serious anthropological information published on Jivaroan culture so far has been on the extinct Santiago or Zamora people. The other Jivaroan tribes definitely known to be in existence today are the Achuara (Achuali), Huambisa, and Aguaruna.

[4] The following Jivaro orthography is partially based on that developed by Glen Turner of the Summer Institute of Linguistics. He is not responsible, however, for errors/idiosyncrasies presented here. These approximate values are assigned to the following phonemes:

Vowels

- a Spanish a
- e English i in sit
- i Spanish i (considered when adjacent to e)
- o Spanish o

Consonants

- c Spanish ch
- h English h (pulmonal, initial/final when preceded by s)
- j English h (pulmonal when following a or i (plus a nasal resonance))
- m Spanish m, but more pulmonal and initial/final
- n Spanish n (pulmonal when following a or i (plus a nasal resonance), retroflex like Spanish n when i is adjacent)

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116 121 stating that they had never heard of such a thing. Incidentally, I never learned with which group he worked—a fact which he appeared to keep secret. I assumed that either the Indians with whom he worked had different concepts, or that he possibly supplied interpretations of his own.

It does not seem probable to me that basic changes in fundamental beliefs could take place in 30 years, so I am inclined to agree with you that the errors in my account were the result of wrong interpretation.

121 128 Since the purpose of the present book is to provide a broad introduction to Jivaro culture rather than a detailed comparison with earlier publications, the reader will not find specific criticisms of Karsten's and Stirling's data in the following pages. These will be gradually provided in more specialized publications, which will also have the function of focusing on particular aspects of Jivaro life in greater detail. To the specialist who reads this work, however, I wish to say that statements that he finds here implicitly contradicting those of the two other authors may be taken, in fact, as explicit corrections of their accounts. A contradictory account here does not imply ignorance of their material.

Beyond this, of course, is the question of cultural change. [115] First of all, I wish to note that several of my most important elderly informants were already raising families prior to Karsten's initial Jivaro fieldwork in 1916–18 and did not come into substantial first-hand contact with whites until fifteen to [114] twenty years later. The fieldwork by Stirling occurred later, in 1930–31, but as Stirling himself noted above, the basic source of difference with my own material was probably his interpreter. In addition, I made a special effort to secure field data that would reveal those aspects of Jivaro culture that had changed or remained stable during this century, and the final chapter of the book is devoted to that subject.